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Relationships

'You and I are part of each other'

Faces. Some of the most vivid memories of my recent trip to India are of faces. Especially the beautiful faces of the children on the cover photo of this issue. They are waving a joyous good-bye to our four-person Lutheran World Relief team, thanking us for our brief visit to a Calcutta slum that is their world.

The children are there, in all likelihood, because their peasant-parents have been squeezed off their land, and have left one of the thousands of India's villages for a "better life" in the city. So in a teeming Calcutta they join thousands of other Indians who search for the same "better life," only to find more exploitation.

Amid such overwhelming odds, despair should be their constant companion. Or so my Western mind thought...until...until I saw those faces! All it took was one look at those faces—exuding joy and thankfulness as they bid us *namaste* (Indian greeting of hello/goodbye)—to realize that hope abounds in that place. All it took

was one child's hand, or her mother in ours, saying without words, "and I are part of each other. Thank you for caring. We care, too."

The church cares through its support of LWR and LWR's Indian inner CASA (Church's Auxiliary Social Action), who offer skill training and education to these dwellers of the slum to help them take control of their own lives. And Indians care, too, offering each of us a coconut from their scant store of food, like Elijah's widow. And we see, in action, a truth of God that comes so hard for many of us Westerners: when we share whether from our abundance or scarcity—God continues to provide. And we never run out.

The God who created humanity and called it "good" places us in a passionate community. We are in relationship with one another. You and the children framed in the photo.

Oh God of the whole world, help us discern community in our world. And us to give, and receive, from each other. members of your same loving family. Amen.

Nancy J. Steffen

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g Rule #6

arguerite M. Rourke

his law of DO NOT reveals the gospel of DO!"

SEVENTH COMMANDMENT **shall not steal.**

ble study

sion 8, "Something to Call Your Own," explores the Seventh Commandment.

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asure and trap.

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nifer Haas-Elliott

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ig Rule #

6

Marguerite M. Rourk

The Big Rules are irrefutable evidence that God is and always has been positively set on being God. The created are not always quick studies, however, and have tried again and again to be the Creator. Before creation was yesterday's news, the created had run amok in the Neighborhood and afoul of the Plan. But the Creator, who is a quick study, arranged many and various ways for the created to be very good at who they are. That way God could go on being God, which is what God does best anyway. It is an economic design.

Pursuant to the debacle in the garden and subsequent centuries of our disobedience, the Evercreating spoke again: "I am the Lord your God," and in mercy upon mercy, provided for us a new covenant, the Big Rules 1 to 10.

Nevermore could there be any doubt about who expects what from whom. Never again could the Creator's beloved created say, "We don't know. We don't understand. We want a contract lawyer." But did this work? Did the Big Rules do the trick for us with God? Oh, please. Faster than anybody could say "golden calf," the created resumed their old tricks, and it would take no less than God-with-us to draw up the final contract.

Still, God never withdrew from us the benediction of the Big Rules. In all of humankind's somewhat sordid history, God has never forsaken us or taken away from us any good thing. God is faithful. Always.

Anything else isn't God.

Big Rule Number 6, "You shall not commit adultery," pelts us headlong and will-first into the Creator's heart who flows God's intentions for us. FIDELITY! God commands us to live in FIDELITY because 1) fidelity is the only way that operates, and 2) it's the only way that works for us. Any other way is, without exception, harmful to us.

"You shall not commit adultery." This law of DO reveals the gospel of DO! If the DO NOT is adultery, then DO is faithfulness. If God's NO is infidelity, then God's YES is fidelity. In this one brief NO is embodied a sumptuous promise of YES! This is our precious inheritance: the gift of God's law clothed in the grace of God's love!

"You shall not commit adultery." Plain as day. No ambiguity required. Not subject to interpretation. No convoluted words, distorted phrases, secret connotations, hidden agendas,

**If the DO NOT is adultery,
then the *do* is faithfulness.**

or political double speak. No line to read between. I do not need to be defined, deconstructed, analyzed, or "unpacked." Requires no debate, clarification, or revision. How very straightforward of God.

Number 6 is the first of the Big Rules to establish how we relate to an individual, indeed, the most important individual in the lives of the created: their spouse. Unique among all others, the wife or husband is sacred—set apart from all others to be regarded above all others. God has given us fidelity as both ground of and safeguard for marriage.

Today's cavalier attitudes and divorce statistics would indicate that both marriage and fidelity are out of vogue. Well, certainly impede one's self-actualization, don't they? So fine-tuning. "As long as we both shall love" is hot; "as long as we both shall live" is not. A Significant-Other-of-the-Vintage doesn't cramp one's style quite like a Wife-for-Life, and a Partner-for-passion arrangement is much more flexible than marrying a forever husband. Hey, why not have our wedding cake and eat it, too?

Many very nice people admire fidelity as a quaint, charming quality, endearing, old-fashioned, simply winsome. Lots of folks consider fidelity a tiresome theological nit-picked when it limits their a la carte menu of relationships.

"Love will keep us together," crooned the pop singers in the '70s. What a crock. Human love can do no such thing. It ought to display a consumer warning label: "Caution! Any love not rooted in God's love and faithfulness is hazardous to your health and will cause you to self-destruct."

the rest of the world is free to proceed without regard to the Life-Giver desires for their lives. So are we, for that. But we who claim the name of Christ live according to perfect freedom that is glad and loving obedience to our will. When it comes to the Big Rules, we're not dealing with bits and tittles here. This is life-stuff: it's what we are made for. Fidelity is God's best effort to keep us whole and to rescue us from ourselves.

The wedding ceremony benediction (*Lutheran Book of Worship*, p. 205) prays that God will keep the newly wedded in his light and truth and love." It is fitting that this good benediction complete the marriage rite. Fidelity is the light that shines in the truth of God's love for us in Jesus Christ.

Fidelity thrives in light; infidelity flees to darkness. Fidelity is seen with the eyes of Christ; infidelity is the blindness of betrayal. Fidelity frees; infidelity enslaves. Fidelity is power; infidelity is impotence. Fidelity is constant and pure; infidelity is capricious and corrupt. Fidelity is joyful truth; infidelity is the great lie. Fidelity is genuine; infidelity is a sham. Fidelity is security; infidelity is dread and fear. Amid the infidelity of our adulterous...generation" (Mark 8:38), fidelity is the peace

to live in fidelity is to live in God. But failing that—and even if—does God have the restoration plan for us! For the adulterous one, there is forgiveness to cleanse the contrite heart and God's mercy to lift up a sin-beaten spirit. For the unfaithful one, there is sal-

vation's balm to
for a repentant
and new life to
live a sorry,

without excuse for what God meant self to be.

God's love keeps us together, respecting one another, kind to one another, caring of one another, honoring one another, loving one another, faithful to one another, in mutual charity, unto death. Big Rule Number 6 is grace-full witness to the faithfulness of God who "founded human community in a way that begins now and is brought to perfection in the life to come" (LBW, p. 203). Let the people say, "Amen!"

The Lord Almighty keep you in his light and truth and love. **CG**

Rev. Marguerite M. Rourk is director of church relations at Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, Columbia, S.C. She and her husband, David Rourk, recently celebrated their 25th anniversary.



LWT Reader Call

*LWT readers
respond to a call
for essays about
God's presence in
marriage, divorce,
or friendship.
Here are nine of
the responses.*

God's Presence in Friendship

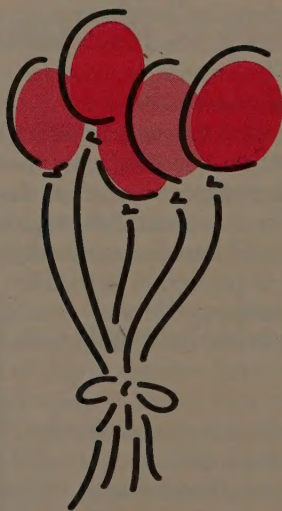
Friendship Begins with a Yes

We eagerly anticipated the arrival of the guests of honor. The hall filled quickly with guests. The one at our table had ever attended a party as this before. The small band began to play music unfamiliar to us, the long tables began to fill with food, and soon the aromas of *Enjera* (a wonderful pancake delicacy) began to fill throughout the room.

Finally the honored couple appeared. The engagement party for Aster and Fessahaye had been a success. Aster looked regal in her straight white gown. Fessahaye was handsome in his black suit.

My mind raced back to nine years ago when Aster, a teenager, speaking very little English, arrived at Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport with her mother. They had traveled from Ethiopia via the Sudan. The journey seemed so apprehensive. Erickson from Lutheran Social Service said, "Janet, fee-

hands; they are so cold!" That's how we began to walk hand in hand, Aster and I,



ge claim and then to our car.
and her mother were to live
as for a while. Just three days
e, our pastor had called to
re if we could care for them.
hat decision to say yes opened
le new world of friendship for
mily. We shared our faith, and
eople of our church showered
with useful household items.
hared our foods and took trips
co-op to taste and smell spices
sary to cook *Engara*. We
ed as we broke down the barri-
culture and language.

s my thoughts returned to the
ities going on all around me, I
ly prayed, "Thank you, God, for
ng us to say yes when we were
to befriend these strangers."
he Blessing of the Rings was
ed and the newly engaged cou-
d the way to the food table, fol-
by the Orthodox priests. Then
ost walked through the room
ame to our table and invited us
ceed next.

low honored we felt...to go
l of more than 400 invited
s! We'll treasure that gesture
ys as it signifies how important
riendship had become.
t started with a simple yes.

Janet Nelson

Ham Lake, Minn.

Flower of Friendship

s been 20 years since we lost our
nter, but our family and friends
ue to surround us with under-
ling.

My husband and I were both at

school. I was teach-
ing second grade
and he was a princi-
pal of an elementary
school across town.
It was a day late in
January when we
were called to the
hospital and told
our daughter had
been in an automo-
bile accident. Her
condition was very
serious. Our pastor came to drive me
to the hospital.

Janel's lung had been punctured,
and she received multiple head
injuries. Specialists in pulmonary and
plastic surgery were called in. Her
life was depending upon only a life-
support system.

With our pastor at our side, we
prepared ourselves for the possibility
of no recovery.

At 5:30 P.M. that Tuesday evening
the support system was removed and
Janel went to heaven with the assur-
ance of painting it pale pink, like her
room. She was 18.

Our Christian friends and imme-
diate families remained our constant
support during Janel's funeral and
throughout the days and years that
have followed. Prayers and love have
given us the strength and under-
standing to meet daily challenges.
Our pastor and our two sons have
been a collective support system.

We have several couples within
the church family who share func-
tions, games, and birthdays on a reg-
ular basis. One couple has assured us



of God's presence in friendship by placing a single red rose at our doorstep on January 28 for the past 20 years.

*Beth G. Peterson
San Luis Obispo, Calif.*

Friends are a Treasure

Friends are proved by sharing joys and tested by sharing adversities. Several years ago my husband was injured in a farm accident. Some friends provided child care so I could be at the hospital with John. Others shared food. Potato soup and muffins never tasted so good! Two women provided the cookies I was supposed to make for my daughter's preschool graduation. Others visited or called or sent money. Many prayed. At a time when we easily could have been sunk by the tasks of daily living, we were buoyed by these expressions of love and concern. Friendship is truly a treasure.

*Sue Marie Rendall
Almond, Wis.*

Reading for Christ

I am semi-literate and struggle with reading, writing, and spelling. I sought help by being tutored through the County Literacy Council. The council matched me with a volunteer

tutor who is also a learning disabilities and reading teacher.

I told my tutor that I want-



ed to read and understand the Bible. She explained to me that this was a reading class, not a religion class. But, as she said, if Scripture was what I wanted to learn and enjoyed reading, she would make it a top priority. Then my tutor got me started by pronouncing words and spelling all the books of the Bible on a cassette tape so I could both hear and see the words while I learned them. We also worked on phonics, reading, writing, and spelling.

I feel God's presence in friends during each and every class session. God has a unique blessing for my tutor because she faithfully volunteers her time to help me reach my goal and Christian mission in life. One of my goals has been reaching out to others. Now I attend Bible study group and comfortably participate. To me, clear, legible letters about Christ come from the spirit of the living God within me.

*Susan Utke
Bowler, Wis.*

And God Was There

Recently Steve, our retarded son, died following cancer surgery. Following Steve's memorial service my former school principal hugged me and said, "I love you"—and God was there.

The next Sunday I was sad and apprehensive when I went to church. My friend Ann slid into the seat beside me, reached over and squeezed my hand—and God was there.

I read the letter from Steve's surgeon relating how special he thought Steve was and how impressed he had been with Steve's "humor."

—and God was there.
When I told our grandson Ian
needed a hug, he crushed me
little arms and asked if I need-
ed from lots of people—and God
was there.

A teenager related to us that she
loved Steve because when she
was 10 years old, “he was the first
who really loved me”—and God
was there.

And Scripture quotations sent
to us and often felt empty. I felt
empty because God’s presence was
real in hugs and in words like
“I ache for you.”

It then I heard the words of our
“When the Word of God is lib-
erated to do its work in us, it will only
be made known to other people, to active
participation in life. In the midst of
involvement with others, and in
the messiness of life we are
aware that we will encounter

and God is here!

Irma Jean Fallon
Manhattan, Kan.

Communion of Saints

“We live in the Holy Spirit,...the
communion of saints....” Often as I
think these words, the name Helen
comes quietly across my heart.

We met, 50-plus years ago, at
Concordia College in Moorhead,
Minnesota. She was a sophomore
from South Dakota, I a freshman
from Michigan. We liked and trusted
each other. Together we laughed, we
cried and we often prayed.

Our friendship might have



ended that June. I never returned to
Concordia. Thankfully, God had
made us one in the Spirit. We mar-
ried in the same year. Pregnant with
our second child, my husband and I
became godparents for their second
daughter.

We keep each other’s families in
our prayers. Letters and phone calls,
prompted by the Spirit, let us share
joys and prayer requests.

God’s presence remains with us,
letting our paths cross in Minnesota,
Michigan, South Dakota, Oregon,
Washington, Pennsylvania, and
Wisconsin. Except for the nine
months in Minnesota, each visit was
for only a few wonderfully rich days,
blessed by the Holy Spirit.

Our children knew each other
only through letters and their moth-
er’s shared stories. On their few brief
visits together, they immediately
became “spiritual cousins.”

God’s presence through the Holy
Spirit has strengthened our friend-
ship. At times we sense the other’s
need for comfort, hope, assurance, or
confidence. We believe this knowing
is a gift of the Holy Spirit.

Yes, friendship is a sign of God’s
presence.

Thank you, God, for the communion of saints, and thanks especially for my friend Helen. Amen.

Ida Cincush Ashcroft

Flint, Mich.

God's Presence in Divorce

Back in the Fold

God came back into my life as my husband, Charlie, left it. Both of us were raised in Christian churches. When our daughter Karyn was young, we went to church for awhile but stopped going because of church politics. A family friend who acted as her godfather stepped in and regularly took Karyn to church with him.

As the years went by, the troubles in our marriage built and built. Charlie went out "for a drink or two" almost every night before coming home for supper. When he finally got home at 8 or 9 P.M. or at 3 A.M., he was often angry at me or Karyn, or at both of us. He "worked" weekends. In my misery, I began to doubt the existence of God.

Then one day I talked with Charlie's brother about Charlie's drinking, and his brother suggested I go to Al Anon. I would go when Charlie was out of town.

A few weeks later, when I got up to get ready for school, Charlie was still drunk and angry from the night before. I could not stand it anymore. I told him to leave. When he moved out I began going to weekly Al Anon

meetings. I read their devotionals daily and began to accept a power back into my life.

By now Karyn's "godfather" had been taking her to Immanuel Lutheran Church here in Boise many years. When she decided to be baptized, she wanted me to be at that celebration. So I began going to church again as she prepared for baptism. The pastor came to me and suggested I join the church, so I did.

Through Al Anon, through divorce, and through my daughter, God worked to bring me back into the fold.

Judith Tucker Cook

Boise, Idaho

God's Presence in Marriage

Forgiveness is the Key

Recently, after celebrating our wedding anniversary, I was asked, "What's the secret of making 40 years of marriage?" My first reaction, and answer, was, "Patience! A lot of patience. And a lot of love!" However, as I thought about it later, I decided the key to a successful marriage is forgiveness.

When forgiveness takes place, there is such a release, a freedom on both sides, and both can move forward into the future with a sense of relief and inner joy. Yes, that is where the "bliss" comes into the picture. Forgiveness does not take place until underlying conflict festers, destruc-

contentment and causing bitterness, despair, and even physical ill-

the early years of our marriage did not handle forgiveness well and it took several years for me to be more open and honest about our inner feelings—and, to be thankful, we are still learning this. Importantly, we have a strong God who helps us in this struggle every day. Jesus is the source of total peace!

*Beverley J. Larkin
Phoenix, Ariz.*

Came in Many Forms

I never forget that dark night. Before, lab results revealed I had a sexually transmitted disease (a nonfatal one, thank God!). My husband had been my only sexual partner, thus the terrible implica-

late one Friday night, in the darkness of our bedroom, I cried, and my husband confirmed my devastation.

In that single, blinding moment of information, my marriage of 14 years lay in pieces at my feet. The joy I had taken with such innocence so long ago—at the altar of the country church where I was baptized and confirmed—were shattered.

But in nearly that same instant, grace came in many forms. Grace transformed those first interactions as a couple (for after adultery your marriage becomes new or it dies). I kept my heart open to my hus-



band's petitions for forgiveness and quieted my mind. (In the pain of betrayal my mind screamed for revenge.) Grace reminded me of the sacredness of our vows, broken or not, and helped me to put the needs of the whole family before my splintered pride.

We have spent the time since learning much about the art of forgiveness. I have become intimate with the pain of betrayal and my imperfect ability to forgive. My husband, too, suffers because of his act carried out in human frailty, one that can never be taken back. But through the grace of God, we have survived, and by God's grace will continue to do so.

I now understand better why God commanded us so bluntly to not commit adultery. God's plan was not to create sexually repressive societies or prevent our pleasure. God wants to protect us and provide us with the boundaries whereby our physical love for one another can most joyfully be expressed. Because God loves us, God teaches us how to love, physically and spiritually.

*—Name withheld
upon request*

God's Hand in Marriage



Tom and Kathleen McGrath

Have we felt the hand of God in our relationship? Yes, God was the day we met.

We both grew up with the name McGrath. At a college one of Tom's friends came to him and shouted over the top of the rock band, "Hey, your sister's here."

"My sister's here?"

"Yeah, that's her, right? It's the McGrath girl from my calculus class."

It wasn't Tom's sister. After all, sister Peggy was four years old at the time! Tom located the cute coe who was pointing out and first laid eyes on the young woman who would one day be his wife.

Not that the relationship started all that well. Kathleen had just broken up with her first true love and had turned off men. She had gone to the dance alone to show her independence. When Tom told her his name, she thought it was some lame pickup line, and Tom ended up having to show his driver's license to prove he, too, was a bonafide McGrath. We soon discovered another coincidence—Tom grew

uth Meade, Kathleen at 5700 North Meade, in Chicago. We'd
otten each other's mail when we were young. Still, this
dissuade Kathleen from her newfound independence, and
t without her phone number—but not without a way to track
m. "Hey, Ken! What time's your calculus class?"

laugh today about the coincidences surrounding how we
at underneath it all we often get the desire to murmur a
you!" to the heavens, and wouldn't be at all surprised to hear
bered "you're quite welcome" in return.

ance meetings may be made in heaven, but marriages are
n earth, through decisions, commitment, forgiveness, and
good marriage is a working partnership. Christians believe
partnership of more than two. God plays an active, though
nes unnoticed, role. It's often only in retrospect that you can
the hand of God in your marriage.

re are some of the ways we've seen God give
nd along the way: In loving one another we
afe place to be ourselves, to become the per-
om God calls forth. Like the lilies of the val-
praise God by becoming our true selves and
alse self. We get a foretaste of God's uncon-
l love when we experience love, however
actly, from one another.

hleen felt this kind of support as she sought
gan her new job. "Tom believed in me and
aged me when I was experiencing a tenta-
d on my sense of competence and self-worth.
ported me as I sought and landed a great
ng just what I love—teaching math." Says
Kathleen has done the same for me. She saw
al in me where I saw only obstacles and insecurity."

r 16-year-old daughter recently told us, "I believe communi-
is the most important ingredient in a relationship. I learned
om you two." She asked when we began talking to each other
ly as we do. That, too, started with a coincidental encounter.
ring our courtship we had broken up, it seemed, for good.
n we loved each other we always hit a roadblock when it came
mitment. After nine months apart, Kathleen happened to
y a worksite where Tom was doing some landscaping. She
see him, but he just happened to look up while she passed
ere must have been a thousand cars that drove by that busy
ction during my shift that day, and I normally didn't notice
them," says Tom. "I was too busy keeping an eye on my chain
the falling tree limbs to be watching traffic. And so when I
ed to look up and see her—driving out of my life forever—

**Chance meetings
may be made in
heaven, but
marriages are
made on earth,
through decisions,
commitment,
forgiveness, and
faith.**

I knew I couldn't let that happen."

Kathleen remembers, "Tom called me that night, and after talking we realized we were still where we had left off. We'd need help if we were going to get beyond our usual obstacles. As we often say to each other, 'If nothing changes, then nothing changes.' We each sought professional help and worked on learning how to communicate our way to a solid relationship." Lessons we learned back then come into play regularly today. We believe God not only found a way to get us back together, but gave us the wisdom to know when we needed help.

We experience communion through many types of marital communication: in good times and tough times; when it feels risky to talk but we do; when we work through disagreements and share our accomplishments; when we make love. We have found that God must like listening in because talking seems to invite miracles to happen. When all seems hopeless, if we talk it through, God shows us the way.

We faced perhaps the most difficult situation of our marriage last summer when we were at loggerheads about our finances. Two different needs clashed, and we both felt strongly attached to our own point of view. Previously, we had been able to come to a meeting of the minds fairly easily about money. Sure, we worried about it, wondered at times how to make ends meet, and constantly wished there was more in the college fund. But this clash went way beyond anything we'd ever experienced. There was anger, jealousy, a sense we both had of not being heard and of "my needs not being considered important by you." Again it took professional help. It took prayer. It took facing our fears. It took lots of time and painful time. It took faith in one another and in God. For our marriage, this was the dark night of the soul. In all this time we felt more the absence of God rather than the presence. It was our longing for God's grace that kept us faithful to each other and faithful to ourselves and ultimately to a place of peace, where God's presence was suddenly there again.

Since from the very beginning of our relationship we had sought and trusted the hand of God leading us, we were able in this time of difficulty to trust again. As Robert Frost wrote, "And that has made all the difference." **CG**



Tom and Kathleen McGrath have been married 19 years. Kathleen teaches math to seventh graders and Tom is executive editor of U.S. Catholic and Salt of the Earth magazines. They have two daughters, Judy, 16, and Patti, 13. "Taking our evening strolls has been a key to a very—usually—happy marriage."

Women's Ways of Friendship

Pamela Cooper-White

It was just one year ago that my husband and I packed all our earthly possessions into a moving van, loaded ourselves and our then-almost-four-year-old daughter into a little white Honda, and began the trek across six states and 2000 miles, from San Francisco to our new home in Chicago.

Miraculously, we both had new minnows awaiting us, had found and purchased a new house and had sold our old one. I was excited by all the new possibilities. But my heart was heavy, too. I had lived in California for many years and loved, deeply loved, many friends there. California had been a place of tremendous growth for me and my closest friendships had been at the very center of it. I was grieving leaving them.

My husband was caring and tried to console me in the weeks before and after the move. But he couldn't hide a certain amount of complexity. He stood off to one side, watched, watching one of my best friends leave. He hugged and cry, not once but on several occasions before the move. "You'll make new friends!" he would say, trying to cheer me up.

"Friends aren't just interchangeable," I would reply in a fresh storm of tears. "They will never replace them!"

My husband and I were, in fact, playing out a very common pattern between women and men. Whether by nature or nurture (probably some of each), women tend toward ways of being in relationship that are identifiable and distinctively feminine.



Whether by nature or nurture, women tend toward ways of being in relationship that are identifiable and distinctly feminine.

Mutuality, Empathy, and Zest

Social scientists have recently realized that from a very early age, most girls, unlike most boys, value people over things. In games and in more serious matters, girls tend to decide what to do based on preserving relationships, rather than rules or principles. Girls tend to learn more by getting close, getting inside what is being studied, while boys tend to distance themselves, to be objective, or to take the subject apart (even when "it" is another person). These styles continue into adulthood.



The conversations over the backyard fence have often been a way for women to share the intimate details of their lives.

The feminine style of connectedness is most clearly in women's ways of friendship. Unlike men, whose friendships tend to center around doing something together (playing basketball or fixing a car), and whose conversations tend to be goal- or age-oriented and problem-solving, women tend to spend "wasting time" together and emotional sharing.

The gossip chain, the conversation over the backyard fence, the coffee klatsch, have been ways in which women have shared intimate details of their lives, their problems, their feelings. Such a style of friendship is characterized by mutuality (deep exchange with equal energy given to each other's concerns), and empathy (the entering into and sharing of each other's feelings). Such an

emotional give-and-take results in increased energy for both women. What psychologist Jean Baker Miller has called "zest." It is not surprising, then, to learn that the word gossip comes from the name God—such mutual caring is not only zestful, it is sustaining. It is sacred.

The Problem of Power

It is possible to see both women's and men's styles of relating as having complementary strengths. Sometimes objectivity is needed. Sometimes solutions need to be found and problems decided. The problem is that both styles are not equally valued in our culture. Women's ways of knowing, of moral decision-making, and of friendship have often been devalued, trivialized, or ignored in all but the most private realm of the home—and even there, statistics have sadly shown, women are often discounted or victimized.

The Shadow Side

It can be tempting to over-idealize women's ways of friendship.

we must avoid that temptation, for it is important to acknowledge the problematic aspects as well—what Carl G. Jung called “shadow side” of things, which we often try to ignore or deny. Women’s ways of relating have a shadow side. Unfortunately, both men and women expect women to be nurturing and giving, so we women sometimes get trapped in what I call a “niceness box.”

Women tend to suppress envy, competition, anger, and discontent. When this happens too frequently, we may slowly find ourselves sacrificing our own legitimate needs for the sake of preserving a connection with others. When caring for others comes at the expense of self-care, problems emerge. Buried feelings come out anyway—often in little jabs, or subtle snubs—which, because the real feeling or need is hidden so deep, neither we nor our friends understand.

Political Women Models

can turn to women in the Bible for models of women’s relationships. In these models, we can find ways to honor the strengths of women’s ways of friendship, while also honoring the parts of ourselves that we sometimes have hidden away—to our own and other’s detriment.

Mary of Bethany (Luke 10:38-42) dared to be different: She dared to escape her duty in the kitchen for a day to study with Jesus—something only boys and men were allowed to do in her day. The Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1-42) and the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21-28) dared to argue and contend with Jesus. Like Jacob (Genesis 32:22-32), they wrestled and sparred with God until they were given a blessing—one received healing (wholeness), the other the gift of prophecy. The woman with the alabaster jar of ointment (Mark 7:36-50) dared to break open a precious container, and from the broken shards of the once-prized object, she poured out the richness of her gift. **CG**

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Because both men and women expect women to be nurturing, we women sometimes get trapped in what I call a “niceness box.”



**That Good Lutheran Question:
What Does This Mean?**

The Sandwich Generation Seeks Answers

Jenine E. Jordahl

Martin Luther makes it sound easy. The catechism, used for generations as a teaching tool, addresses the “What does this mean?” question countless times. I only did Luther ask the question, answered it. I suspect brother Martin knew, even as we have learned, it is in the answering of life’s questions that we have difficulty, but rather in the living. This is especially true as we consider the “aging of America.”

We continue to learn more about living healthy lives, and as a result, No Americans are living longer. Often retirement is an opportunity to enjoy some of the pleasures of life. However, for about one in five older people, the golden years are not so golden, or at least not what they anticipated. A significant number of older adults need some kind of assistance—ranging from finances, meals, and transportation, to bathing and getting out of bed. According to recent statistics, many adults will spend more years caring for elderly loved ones than raising children. That role falls primarily on women—a daughter, daughter-in-law, or niece. It is no wonder, then, that we continue to define and redefine Luther



The author's mother,
Esther Peterson.

tion: "What does this mean?"

I have lived much of my adult life seeking answers to this question. I returned home from college to help Mother care for Dad. He lived for nearly four more years, the last six months in a care facility. About fifteen years ago, we could see that a change of living situation for Mother could extend her years of independence. The answer appeared to be a new "retirement" apartment complex where several of her friends also lived. Attractive features included accessibility and

seven months after moving to the apartment she returned to her house, simply unable to leave "home." Some community services were available to her, but she was reluctant to admit need, or accept help. She was blessed by wonderful neighbors, friends, and siblings who enabled her to remain in her own home for several years. Fragile health eventually prompted her to consent to move into our home about 15 miles away. Our family of five, including two teenagers, adjusted. Roles were redefined and the environment modified to accommodate her needs.



Esther at a Bethel Home activity function with an area high school student.

December 31, 1994, Mother moved to the nursing home where I work. I knew she would receive excellent care and I would continue to see her daily.

Nevertheless, I cried all the way home that day! We did we do the right thing? Could we have managed a bit better? She wanted to die at home—could I have done more? I meet and counsel daily with people asking the same kinds of questions, experiencing the same struggle and feelings of guilt. People seeking the best solutions for difficult situations. What does it mean to be a family, to love and honor our elders, to be responsible and caring when roles are reversed? What does it mean to live in balance, nurturing our relationships with spouse, children, and friends—and to care for self? As in all of life, we find no easy answers because we deal with individual needs and wants. However, some guidelines may be helpful as we seek appropriate answers to our own unique questions.

1. Plan ahead. Look for solutions before they are needed. If an elderly loved one is considering a change in living arrangements, plan for the long term. For example, moving from a large home to a smaller one is good. However, would an accessible apartment or condominium-type arrangement be better?

Explore the availability of assisted-living programs that provide a range of services, enabling elderly people to remain in their own homes longer. This includes such things as help with housekeeping, bathing, transportation for shopping and appointments, even supervision of medications. Adult care can provide relief for those who assume responsibility for a primary caregiver at home.

According to recent studies, many adults will spend more years caring for elderly loved ones than raising children.

Local or county human services agencies, hospitals, or nursing-home social workers can likely provide information about such services.

2. Obtain needed documents. While an elderly loved one is still capable and competent, encourage them to appoint a Durable Power of Attorney (for financial matters) and Power of Attorney for Health Care. In most states these are separate documents. The latter is very important for people of all ages to ensure that personal wishes regarding medical treatment are honored. The Health Care Power of Attorney may also avoid the stress and expense of court costs for a guardianship hearing and protective placement, should an individual become unable to make decisions in his or her own best interest. Wills and estate planning should always be kept up to date.

3. Seek help with decisions. Don't make decisions unilaterally! Whenever possible include the elderly loved one as well as your own spouse, children, and siblings in the decision-making. This is especially important when your time as a caregiver will have an impact on them. Discuss what the decisions will mean for your relationships, and ask others to help keep things in perspective.

4. Be honest and forthright. Frequently, individuals may not recognize their own needs and may need gentle reminders. They may assume that they can ask friends to call every morning, bring in the mail, shop, or provide transportation. Friends are usually willing to assist with occasional needs, but frequent requests or expectations for ongoing help can strain otherwise good relationships. Friends most

ally provide quality time rather than basic care for individuals.

Keep your promises. One way to keep promises is not to make promises you may not be able to keep. We do not make promises related to specific situations—none of us knows what future health-care needs may be. I suppose we would choose to peacefully sleep into death, but that is not the reality for most. Many is the time I've heard children or spouses agonize over a promise made years ago to "put mother in a nursing home," when, in fact, that may be the most appropriate option.

So what can we say? We can promise that we will do everything possible to assure comfort and quality of life. And, we can promise to love, support, and advocate for loved ones through all the changes in their lives.

Do your best, then let it rest. Don't get caught in a guilt trap! It is important to know that there may be a time when the quality of life for a loved one may actually be improved in the structured setting of a care facility. This is especially true for people who suffer from such things as memory loss, dementia, or anxiety. When family is providing hours of care daily, they have energy for little else. Professionals can relieve the stress of care-giving so family members can enjoy quality time with their loved one.

Care facilities, especially nursing homes, are often targets of sensationalized negative headlines. It is important to remember that nursing homes operate under stringent state regulations. State regulations vary. Shopping for a nursing home is important. Ask questions specific to the needs of your loved one, tour the facility, visit with residents and family members. And continue to keep your promise to support, and advocate for your loved one in that setting until the end.

Author not only asked his now-famous question, but provided a framework in which to build the answer. Each response begins: We should fear and love God so that....

We continue to seek answers to questions in complicated lives that defy simple solutions. And as we do, let us love and trust our God who understands the struggle, who gives us strength in weakness, forgiveness in failure, and the ability to live our lives in relationship. **CA**

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Golden Marriage

Marj Leegard

She sat down in the easy chair and let the festivities around her wind down. The gold tinsel on the ever-green trees bordering the yard glistened in the setting sun. Jimmie was packing up his music-making equipment. The laughing young women were finishing the cleanup in the kitchen.

Her granddaughters flopped down on the floor beside her chair. "It was a nice party," Megan said, "Except for the pickles. Pickles are supposed to be salty and sour and taste like garlic. Sweet. Aaaaagh."

"The music was worse than the pickles," Julie said. "The music you *had* to listen to. The pickles you could leave on your plate. I asked Jimmie to play some good music, and he said he was playing what you and Grandpa liked."

As the girls left for other pursuits, she saw her husband standing on the sidewalk, telling the last of the guests he was glad they came. He stood as straight and tall as he had the first day she met him.

Her mind went back to their wedding day, and she wondered how anyone could make promises that lasted such a long time: "So long as ye both shall live." She supposed that they had said "plight thee my troth," which was easier then because in that light-headed moment before the altar she hadn't the faintest idea what

"plighting her troth" meant.

At the celebration today nobody had asked her the secret of a long marriage but she thought about what she would have said.

How could she have known that he would hurry through work to come in and rock baby when they were sick? Would he have held valuable his penchant for getting up earlier and working harder and keeping at it longer? That didn't seem as important as his blue eyes when she was making those impossible promises.

Family. She thought they had a new beginning, as new and shiny as the kettles they unpacked. But since their marriage they had unpacked so many things. His ethnic heritage and her food dislikes. His saving ways and her urge to travel. The way he made chicken pie the way her grandmother made it—crust on both the top and bottom. Yankee ancestors groaned at the thought.

She felt rested and got up to thank her daughter-in-law and friends in the kitchen. She was glad no one had asked her the secret of a long and happy marriage. She didn't know any secrets, only the truth: God's children are cared for in every way. And sometimes there are golden weddings anniversaries. C

LWT columnist Marj Leegard from Detroit Lakes, Minn.

Church 'Circle' Means Sharing Lives

Kaye Mattis

A group that started out carrying diaper bags is now carrying eye glasses, hot-flash-fanning hankies, and discussing the IQs of grandchildren.

ral years ago, as my church circle met at my home, my mama-clad daughter fawned on the leader as she led the lesson. Soon my daughter got up, and the leader

me eye, and asked her, "This is a circle, why aren't those kids sitting on the floor in a circle?" I have belonged to this same church circle for the past 19 years. These dozen women have gone through many of life's stages together. We started meeting at the church on the mornings while a volunteer babysitter took our small children to the Sunday school rooms. We dropped out of pre-school children after a few years and began meeting in our homes.

We went through grade school children, through high school to college students, and one by one most of our children have married. Our bible application discussions most often centered around our homes and children.

I had church circle at my house one week. Boy, has this group ever changed! It is a "mess."

Not a one of us can see a thing without our reading glasses. We

attempted to make banners for the church. It took more time to round up a dozen pairs of glasses than it did to cut out the whole pattern.

The next thing I noticed was that about half the group was experi-

encing their first hot flashes. I have never seen so much fanning going on during a cool fall evening.

This group has come a long way. A group that started out carrying diaper bags and discussing Gerber products is now carrying eye glasses, hot-flash-fanning hankies, and discussing the IQs of their grandchildren.

I've got a suspicion that hearing could be the next thing to go. We will then have come full circle. Hollering at each other during a meeting, we will resemble the first times we got together and hollered over the chattering of our children.

Guess that could finally explain what a church "circle" really stands for. Supporting each other through good times and bad times, from youth to advanced youth...living full circle. C

Kaye Mattis, Walnut Grove, Minn., is a widow, and is employed as a reporter. She is a member of Almah Circle at English Lutheran Church.

The Hidden Promise

James A. Nestingen



Session 7: True Friends

Study Text: Exodus 20:14

Story Text: Ruth 1:15-18; 3:1-8; 4:9-15

The Sixth Commandment You shall not commit adultery.

What does this mean? We are to fear and love God so that in matters of sex our words and conduct are pure and honorable, and husband and wife love and respect each other.

Memory Text

I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father (John 15:15).

Overview

Next to life itself, the most precious gift we receive is companionship. There is nothing like a friend. But there is one friendship dearer than all others—that shared with a mate. In the Sixth Commandment, God distinguishes these two kinds of relationships so that we can enjoy our friends and give ourselves without reservation to our mates without getting the relations mixed up.

Opening

O God of all grace, you have created us for companionship and to have your partners in giving life and a future to the earth. Give us loyalty in our friendships. Grant those who marry the freedom of fidelity, that they might delight in their spouses and continue to grow in love until life's end. *Amen.*

Story

When God was creating humankind, one of the first things God was concerned about was companionship. It is not good for either a woman or a man to be alone. So God makes sure that we have friends.

By giving friends to all, God also calls many people into the deepening of marriage—a relationship committed for life. Wedded, people become one and then, more often than not, the two become three, four, or more.

The book of Ruth tells the story of a beautiful friendship between two women and a relationship between a woman and a man who loved and respected each other. In this story we can see many facets of the Sixth Commandment.

The story begins with three women left as widows: Naomi first, whose sons married foreign women, Ruth, and Orpah. Widows in Old Testament times had an especially difficult time. Losing their husbands, they lost two things a woman depended upon in those times: physical protection and economic support.

Knowing that she couldn't provide for her younger daughters-in-law, Naomi urged them to go back to their own country. **Read Ruth 1:11-13.** Why did Naomi encourage Ruth and Orpah to leave her and go back to their own country?

Ruth's reply to Naomi (verses 16-17) is often compared to wedding vows but it is actually a song of friendship. What do you suppose had tied Naomi and Ruth so closely together?

What did Ruth promise Naomi?

Naomi and Ruth went back to Naomi's family territory, near Bethlehem. During the barley harvest, Ruth went into the fields to glean. Like other widows, she would follow behind the harvesters,

picking up any grain they left behind them. It wasn't much of a way to find a living, and it was dangerous—a woman in open country couldn't be completely confident of her safety.

But Ruth had a wonderful surprise. Boaz, who owned the field, recognized her as an ambitious person and took a liking to her. He looked after her, letting her glean close to those who were harvesting and protecting her from unwelcome attentions. At lunchtime he invited her to eat with him and the helpers.

3. When Naomi heard the story that evening, she recognized an opportunity for Ruth. **Read Ruth 3:2.** Why does Naomi need to seek some security for Ruth?

What is the basis of her plan in verses 3-5? And what do you think of her plan?

When Boaz woke up and found Ruth at his feet, he proved to be a different kind of man than many. In Leviticus 25:25 we read about the idea of next of kin; the Hebrew word is *goel*. When a relative would fall into difficulty and have to sell a piece of property, for example, it was the responsibility of the next of kin to redeem or buy back the property. In the New International Version translation, this word in Leviticus is translated "kinsman-redeemer." It is the same word used in Ruth 3:9.

4. What is the duty of the next of kin to which Ruth refers in Ruth 3:9?

How does Boaz answer her offer in verses 10-13?

Ruth 4:9-15 brings the story of Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz to a wonderfully happy ending. It also shows the promise of both marriage and friendship.

After Boaz and Ruth married, the women in the neighborhood were quick to see the blessing of the friendship between Naomi and Ruth. In Ruth 4:14-15, they sing of it.

What has Ruth's friendship meant to Naomi, according to the women's song?

How had Ruth's song in 1:16-17 come true?

Commandment

Two commandments dealing with life—where it is learned (the Fourth) and where it is lived out (the Fifth)—God now takes up the theme of life: sexual relationships.

To begin with, the purpose of the command is to protect women and men from all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse. The old sinners among us know the darker side of sex—the potential for hurtfulness, dominance, the hate that can be expressed in this way. When life becomes a sexual meat market, nobody can feel safe.

At the same time, the community begins in our bedrooms. Here the next generation is conceived and will carry the family, work, the government, and the church into the future. So God wants to put a protective hand over this future right from the start. True, God can turn a bad start into a fruitful end; but at the same time, God expects us to be faithful stewards of ourselves and of one another.

Thus the commandment requires that we be chaste and honorable in both word and deed. To be chaste is to be true to the commitments you have made. For those who are not committed to another, it means refraining from the deepest levels of physical and emotional intimacy. For those who are in committed relationships (married), it means reserving those deep intimacies for a mate.

As in the Fourth Commandment, the word *honor* or *honorable* has to do with cherishing. Sexuality is a wonderful gift of God; it also makes people terribly vulnerable to one another. So, as with the family itself, God wants sexual relations to occur in a context of cherishing and being cherished. It is a gift of love, given for a human future. Words are as important as deeds, sexually. Fresh remarks, lewd suggestions, indecent proposals, dirty stories told between sexes all are a way of cheapening both the gift itself and the people involved.

6. Birth control has made a big difference in public sexual standards. Does it change the Sixth Commandment? If so, how? If not, why not?

The Promise

Companionship is the promise of the Sixth Commandment. Not everybody is married. Some people are widowed, like Naomi and Ruth. Some are single. Some are divorced. But none of us can go along without friends, and the Sixth Commandment speaks to that.

One of the things that makes friendship so deep is the freedom of it. When Ruth had the choice to leave Naomi, she became aware of how much she cared for her mother-in-law. Their friendship deepened. It doesn't always work that way, however. Sometimes friendships need to end. People develop different interests. A new opportunity may arise. A move can pull a friendship apart. Sometimes new friendships take priority over the old. Friendship requires freedom.

When Ruth married Boaz, a new dimension of friendship opened to them. The intimacy of their friendship deepened and became love. The love that grew resulted in new life: a child. Their commitment to one another and the shared vocation of parenthood pulled them together so that their marriage wasn't a matter of choice anymore. That's what is supposed to happen in married love. Even when there is conflict—sometimes just because of the conflict—a couple can enter more deeply into an intimacy.

If part of friendship is having a choice about whether to stay in the relationship, part of the joy of marriage is surrendering to that choice. Friends may be friends for life; in marriage people promise to stay together until death parts them.

A lifetime commitment frees people for the deepest dimension of love and intimacy by giving them a basis for confidence—that you will always be there for one another. If children are a part of the picture, they can enrich that love, bringing their parents more deeply into shared responsibilities and pride.

Why is a sense of choice important in friendship?

What makes choice a problem in a committed relationship—marriage?

What does this mean?

When the command and the promise come together, it is easy to see why God prohibits sexual relationships outside of a lifetime commitment. But it is also easy to see why God's own friendship, established through the forgiveness of sin, is so important.

Sex messes up friendship. When one friend is pushing, preying, or exploiting the other's sexual potential, sexuality is intruding on friendship. When one friend can't be sure the other will honor his or her other relationships, sexuality is intruding. We are to fear and respect God and extend that same respect to one another.

One of the purposes of the Sixth Commandment is to free up friendship from sexual pressures. In fact, in Matthew 5:27-28 Jesus interpreted the commandment even more strictly, prohibiting so much as a lustful glance. God wants us to enjoy the freedom of friendship so that we don't have to worry about protecting ourselves.

Can women and men be friends?

Is it possible for the commandment to defuse some of the tension that can occur between friends? Explain your answer.

At the same time that it frees friendship, the Sixth Commandment also frees couples for the deep self-giving of a life-long commitment. Knowing that they will be together for life, knowing the trust that comes with sharing deep intimacies, couples can give themselves to one another sexually without restraint. For sexuality is one of God's great gifts, given for the expression of love and to be passed on to future generations.

9. How do committed partners “love and respect one another?”

Why is respect important to love? What can love do for respect?

God has established a relationship with us. Its terms were clearly stated in the First Commandment. On this basis, we claim God's friendship and hold on to our hope for respectful, enduring relationships with other people. God has promised to be your God, closer than any friend could ever be, even if all other friends disappear, adultery disrupts life, and disappointing relationships dog your days. The Sixth Commandment is a sentinel for that promise.

Looking Ahead

Next to life and companionship, the most important thing for survival is some property—not necessarily enough to open a real estate office, but property sufficient to go about our lives and callings. The Bible speaks to us about property in the Seventh Commandment.

The Hidden Promise: A Study of the Ten Commandments
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Note: This issue of Lutheran Woman Today carries two sessions of the Bible study. Session 8 begins on page 31.

The Hidden Promise

James A. Nestingen



Session 8: Something to Call Your Own

Study Text: Exodus 20:15

Memory Text: Acts 4:32-5:11

Seventh Commandment Thou shalt not steal.

What does this mean? We are to fear and love God so that we do not steal our neighbor's money or property, or get them in any dishonest way, but help him to improve and protect his property and means of earning a living.

Memory Text

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who dwell in it.... (Psalm 24:1)

Overview

God has given us life and protected it where it is given, lived, and loved, and now God turns attention to our property. We each have to take care of some things we can call our own—essentials necessary to provide for ourselves and to serve our neighbors. So in the Seventh Commandment, God puts a protecting hand over what is ours and places it into faithful stewardship of it.

Prayer

Thank you, good and gracious God, that you provide the things we need to live and to be of service to others. Help us to treasure these things as gifts of your hand, and then open our fingers so that we will not grasp or clutch, but give freely in service to you and to our neighbors. Amen.

The Story

The story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-11 shows what is stake in the Seventh Commandment. God doesn't have anything against private property. But since God gives all that we need, and often more, God wants to make sure that the benefits of our belongings spread beyond us.

As Luke tells the story, the people of the early church were gathered in Jerusalem after Pentecost. Peter was taking a lead in preaching, and with dramatic effect: Thousands of people were being converted.

Still, with all the excitement, there were bills to pay. So the apostles and those closest to them pooled all they had, surrendering their property to the common good.

1. Read Acts 4:32-37. What did pooling their goods offer to the early Christians?

How do you think the freedom of this sharing served the Holy Spirit's purposes?

Ananias and Sapphira found it difficult to let go of all that they had. So they sold some property and held back part of the proceeds. When Ananias came to present the money, Peter accused him of breaking two commandments.

2. Read 5:1-3. What was Peter's accusation?

Why did Peter say that Ananias's sins were against the Holy Spirit?

Breaches of the commandments often double up like this. Eighth Commandment gets broken to cover some other offense. In stealing. Ananias and Sapphira's theft is complicated like this. In verse 4, Peter asked Ananias a series of questions, two of which had to do with Ananias and Sapphira's rights to the property.

When did Ananias and Sapphira lose their
 t to all the proceeds of the sale?

ut makes this stealing?

The Holy Spirit apparently had a stake in Ananias and
 phira's property as well. **Look again at 4:32-33.**

How would the proceeds of Ananias's and
 phira's sale have served the Holy Spirit's purpos-

When Peter confronted Ananias with his double-dealing,
 nias dropped dead. When Sapphira arrived, the same thing hap-
 ed. Property problems quickly become a matter of life and death.
and 5:7-11.

If you were the coroner, what might you have
 nised to be the cause of death for Ananias and
 phira?

What ways do lying and stealing cause us to die
 y in small ways?

The Command

n though Peter asks it in the form of a question in Acts 5:4, it is
 r that he and the rest of Scripture assume that we have a right
 hat is our own. In fact, God gives us clear title to what is ours.
 re are lots of things that we can't get along without for very long:
 ace to sleep, a roof over our heads, food and utensils to prepare it,
 eans of transportation, tools for work, and so forth. For those
 ng us who must fight to get these things each time we need

them, every day is a battle.

Even if our basic needs are met on a daily basis, we will struggle with property. For the old sinner in us is never satisfied with what our own. It also wants what is the neighbor's. So there are any number of ways to steal.

The first and simplest is simply to take what is the neighbor's helping ourselves. Robbery, burglary, shoplifting, or simply taking what is left lying in the open are all the same. The thief walks off with the goods. The neighbor not only loses the good of what has been stolen, but now has to pay to replace it.

In the original version of the Small Catechism, Luther listed two other common forms of theft: dishonest trade and shoddy wares. For example, the difference between bankers that charge ruinous interest rates and burglars is that those bankers do it in broad daylight and call it good business. By the same token, businesspeople who take excessive profits are profiteers—a very common form of theft.

Producing and selling poor quality products is another way to steal. Some department store owners might complain furiously about their losses to shoplifters, and at the same time look all over the world for people willing to work for little, producing merchandise that is just barely adequate. So while complaining of petty theft, they steal from honest craftspeople, exploiting the workers they hire and their own customers with low quality goods.

The Seventh Commandment requires equal benefit for both buyer and seller. Both are entitled to what is theirs. The buyer should pay a reasonable price for decent quality. The seller should receive good payment plus sufficient profit to reward the service provided. Anything short of this, anything that renders it unequal in an involuntary way, is theft.

6. What are some common forms of theft that you experience in your community?

What makes them stealing?

The Promise

Property is one dimension of life in which God looks for partnership. When it comes to salvation, God says, "Hands off! You leave that to me! I have taken care of it all in Christ." But when it comes to serving the neighbor, God is always glad to have our help.

The basic way we give this service is through our vocations.

ly members, employees, citizens, and congregation members, we give the gifts of ourselves and our goods to our neighbors. God has a plan of making all of us useful, even when the economy is tight and we don't appear to be much to spare.

Generally, when God starts giving us the things we need, God doesn't know when to quit. So among what we have, there is usually something additional that would be of use to someone else. The extra is an opportunity to be of further service. For while God is caring for us, God is using what has been entrusted to us to help us serve those in need around us.

Of course, to the old sinner in us there is no such thing as something extra—in fact, there is never enough. Ask yourself some questions: “Do I really need this?” “Could I get along without it?” “Would somebody be able to use this better than I can?” You may be surprised that you can let go. For when Christ softens our hearts, soon our hearts start to open as well, especially when there is a neighbor, near or far-off, who could use a little help.

Luther once said, in his characteristically blunt way, that anything we have not used for the benefit of the neighbor is stolen! What do you think of this statement?

Is the statement fair? Too sharp? Not sharp enough?

What does this mean?

For an explanation of the Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer, “Give us today our daily bread,” the Small Catechism says, “God gives daily bread, even without our prayer, to all people, though sinful, but we must pray in this prayer that he will help us to realize this and to receive daily bread with thanks.”

This is quite a statement to make, especially with all the talk of world hunger. If God gives daily bread to all people, why are some people starving? But in fact, the Scripture says the same thing as Luther: God wants everyone to have enough food (see Psalm 37:25).

8. How do we make sense of these statements of the Catechism and Scripture when we know so many people are starving?

How are the Catechism and Scripture to be understood at this point?

In fact, it sometimes seems as if the promise of Psalm 37 is accepted more readily by people who have little than by those who have much. For people who haven't received as much have a way of noticing the way goods are distributed. Many who have much can never get enough; those who have little are forced to do without.

When the command and the promise come together, it becomes more and more difficult for church people to tolerate the inequities of distribution decisions and structures. This is why Lutheran Women's Relief, for example, is considered by governments and helping agencies around the world to be one of the most efficient and effective organizations in helping people in trouble. Rolling bandages, making quilts, gathering up surpluses to give aid, helping the poor help themselves—all this shows the spirit of the Seventh Commandment. It was not given to stand guard for the greedy, but to help us be open-handed.

God intends our gifts to stay on the move, to keep circling out to the farthest corners of the earth. God's purpose is to restore the earth, to take it away from all of the powers that have confined and destroyed it. Our property has a place in God's work, for finally it is God's property.

Psalm 24:1 speaks of God's lordship in the earth. Revelation 21 promises a new heaven and a new earth when the Lord God comes again. Revelation goes on to say that God will dwell on the new earth and will wipe away the tears from mortals' eyes—death will be gone as will mourning and crying and pain.

9. What does God intend to do with those powers that cause poverty, sorrow, and loss, according to Revelation 21:1?

When the apostle Paul speaks of the implications of the gospel, he says, "Present your bodies as a living sacrifice" (Romans 12:1). The word "bodies" includes not only our physical beings but everything we possess.

- Link the promises of the text in Revelation with the invitation in Romans. What does our proper response have to do with God's restoration and renewal of the earth?

Living Ahead

Our property, the next most important essential of daily life is a good name and trustworthy talk. A good name carries freedom with it; a bad name becomes slavery. Truth-telling enables us to deal with realities we have to face; lies spread distortions. God gave us the Tenth Commandment to watch over our names and our truths.

Meet the Author

Rev. James A. Nestingen is a popular speaker and author of several books on Lutheran theology. A gifted storyteller of the faith, Dr. Nestingen is a professor of church history at Luther Theological Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota.

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This issue of Lutheran Woman Today carries two sessions of the study. Session 7 begins on page 24.

Our Relationship with **Things**

Julie A. Kanarr

It's an old, battered, stainless steel thermos. Although most of the paint has been chipped off and its dent surface is a little rusty, you can tell that it once was green. Unless the lid is screwed on just right, it leaks. Yet that thermos is my constant companion. By day, it rolls around on the floor of my pickup truck, and at night it stands between my kitchen sink and coffee pot. A friend told me he'd thought of buying me a new thermos, but he changed his mind because they were too expensive.

"I'm glad," I replied. "This one can't be replaced." My friend looked puzzled. Yes, my old battered thermos is rusty and leaks if you don't put the lid on right. Yes, new ones are available in the store. But my old thermos is irreplaceable because it belonged to my oldest brother. It became mine after he died. This thermos doesn't just carry coffee; it carries memories of my brother. I look beyond the dents, the rust, and the chipped paint to the conversations Mark and I used to have. Once a silent witness to his words, this thermos now bears silent witness to his memory.

All of us have something that we treasure beyond its material worth. Maybe it is your mother's china, your grandfather's pocket watch, or your grandma's wedding ring. Perhaps it is your son's teddy bear or your uncle's rocking chair. Sometimes the value of these material things is obvious to others. Some of these treasures will fetch a high price at an auction or in an antique store, but more often, their value is hidden from others and known only to you. We say such things have sentimental value, yet it goes deeper than that. The material things we treasure have value beyond sentimental value or even beyond nostalgia for the past.

The hidden value of possessions lies in what the things represent for us. Things that we have received

from others become bearers of memories. They are the earthen vessels that hold hidden treasures. Our most precious possessions are those that have a story attached. If you ask me about my thermos, I will tell you about my brother; I will tell you about how I found his thermos on the front seat of his pickup truck the morning after his death.

**ings that we have
eived from others
ome bearers of
ories. They are the
then vessels that
d hidden treasures.**

As I continue to use his thermos, I honor my brother and his memory. Material things are a focal point of our lives. And therein lies not only the treasure, but also the danger, of our possessions. Sometimes our attitude toward our possessions interferes with our relationships with others. We may cling so tightly to our possessions that we let human relationships slip through our fingers. Coupled with jealousy and greed, our possessions become weapons that drive a wedge between us and others.

Families have been torn apart by inheritance squabbles. The consumer sport of trying to outdo what our neighbors have is a symptom of being possessed by our possessions. And when we become possessed by our possessions, we find that they have stolen from us those relationships that should be most precious.

Let us use our possessions in a way that honors our relationships. If I take something that belongs to another, or if I do not use things in a way that nourishes my relationships with others, I steal from today. If I fail to recognize the value of a gift, if I disregard the inheritance given me, I steal from yesterday. If I fail to care for my possessions, if I am wasteful or greedy, if I diminish the inheritance of those who come after me, I steal from tomorrow. And when we rob yesterday, today, and tomorrow, we steal far more than we could ever imagine. We become simultaneously thief and victim, for in divorcing our possessions from our relationships, we rob ourselves. **C**

The Rev. Julie A. Kanarr is a native of Port Townsend, Wash. She has served at Zion and Pleasant Prairie Lutheran Churches in Flaxville, Mont., since 1990.



The author
with the
Johnson
family
children.



Open-Handed Giving

Jennifer Haas-Elliott

What does it mean to be 'open-handed'? Is it possible to live in such a way that we willingly give what a thief would take?

Or what happens when a gift prepared in love is stolen by the person for whom it was intended? Is it possible to live so openly that nothing can be stolen? And is this what God requires of us? These are questions worth struggling with as we think about the Seventh Commandment.

I am in the middle of my internship year—of the seminary experience on the path to ordained ministry—in Lower Brule, South Dakota, an Indian reservation. I had requested to be considered for this location after learning about it and the work here.

I came to interview with the supervising

to see if the mission was a good
h for my skills. Yes! This
ed to be a place where I would
eful to the Lord and to the peo-
f God who live here. But on the
night here, I began to wonder
night not be too much for me—
seemed to be so much pain
trouble. My sleep the night of
er eve was restless.

About dawn I heard a voice in
room as clear as could be. "You
their priest, not their Savior." I
p in bed, filled with a sense of
e. "I can do 'priest,'" I said
l. "I can do priest."

As a newcomer I became
ainted with the local children
itting outside, talking to
, and giving them cookies.
covered that if I was feeling
y, all I needed to do was
a batch of cookies, sit on a
outside the front door, and
(Native American hospi-
always offers food to the
.) Soon the kids and I had
gular afternoon appoint-

One hot day I baked
cookies for the
afternoon's conver-
sations, and while
cooled I went on an errand
took me away for about
an hour. I returned to dis-
that some kids had cut open
kitchen screens and taken the
es. While I was upset, there
a strangeness to the whole
. What exactly was gone, I
l myself? What did they
? I had, after all, intended the
es to be eaten by the very peo-
who took them.
till it bothered me, until it

struck me that what had been
stolen was my peace of mind.
Shouldn't it be safe to leave kitchen
windows unlocked on hot summer
days—even if cookies are cooling
inside? The cookies were eaten as
spoils of a "raid," not as a gift. I had
also lost my pleasure—the pleasure
gained in the act of giving.

We will often take all we can get
for free. Is taking more than we
need a kind of stealing? Does every
gift have a price? Must we earn
what is freely given?

We started a Wednesday after-
noon Bible study for kids—with sto-
ries, games, and crafts, followed by
supper. Once the word was out, "You



Bryce (left) and Kelly Johnson work on a
project at Wednesday Bible school.

can get a free supper at the church,"
a number of kids showed up too late
for activities but just in time for
supper.

One day, a young lady said to
me, "Teacher, you should make peo-
ple come for the Bible study if they
want to eat." I said, "Well, let's think
about this. Do you remember the
stories about Jesus feeding people?"

You know, the time when all they had was five loaves of bread and two fish and they made food for a real big crowd?"

"Yes," came the answer.

"Well, do you remember hearing Jesus say you guys can't eat if you don't listen to me first?" I felt the wheels turning in both our heads as we thought of Jesus' generosity.

From the beginning I told the kids I would share my "toys," and my innertubes for swimming proved particularly popular. One day I came home to find the kitchen screens cut and an innertube missing. Later I saw it around the neck of one of my visitors. I said to him, "I see you have my innertube. You know I would have loaned it to you had you asked." Unfortunately, the boy never came back and our dialog ceased.

One night a young girl asked to borrow the other innertube, and I was good to my word. She did not bring it back that evening, and the next day I found it slashed down by the beach. They came back several days later and asked to borrow the innertube, and I told them that there were no longer any innertubes to loan. Sometimes our hands are empty!

There is stealing of all sorts going on these days—in every part of the country. In my life I have listened to people tell of the loss of joy and self-worth and of the pain of having their trust betrayed by incest and sexual abuse. I have heard students tell of teachers who

We will often take all we can get for free. Is taking more than we need a kind of stealing?

don't allow them to realize their potential—and thereby rob the opportunities for further education. I see little children whose good health has been stolen by malnutrition from being fed on cola and candy; whose legs are bent and teeth rotted. I see people who have been robbed of place and livelihood by government policies. Where does the Seventh Commandment intersect with the lives? With all of our lives?

How do we who are part of "the priesthood of all believers" live, as thieves but with open-handed generosity? There is always a resistant undertone: We want gratitude, appreciation, response.

Perhaps it is at this very place where our humanness collides with God's godliness, especially as we see Jesus. Jesus gave all—and could so because he was the All-Giving love come down from heaven—and man. God gives of God's self in a way that we cannot fully comprehend, because without Christ in our lives we cannot give our all. We hear the ones crying, "More, we want more!"

Lord, we are hungry. Feed us. Lord, we are lonely. Love us. Lord, we are lost. Lead us. CGA

Jennifer Haas-Elliott, a Lutheran intern, is serving an Episcopal congregation on the Lower Brule Reservation. She enjoys quilting, weaving, writing, and sewing church banners and vestments.

Employing the Seventh Commandment

Esther Arne

[Thieves hit jackpot, 724
s.]

What was the newspaper headline the day I sat down to write this piece? If there'd been headlines about recent incidents in my own company, they'd have read like

Cashier takes \$1000 in receipts."

Company's 800 number is private call-in line for employee's friend."

Disgruntled employee of customer list to competi-

tion. Don't get me wrong. I love being a businesswoman. And every day in business—or at least—garner such "head-

lines.' But this rash of incidents prompted me to reflect on the Seventh Commandment and busi-

ness. "You shall not steal." That's a simple word, steal. And, in our less-than-perfect world, stealing is a reality in businesses today. It's often so prevalent and accepted that many people aren't even aware they're stealing. Businesses often treat such losses as an anticipated expense of doing business. In truth, stealing can take

place at the hands of many parties in the business world—customers, employees, and employers. How so?

Consider the quiz on page 45. Which of the situations do you think constitutes stealing? Why?

In our technological world, many companies today go to great lengths to make stealing difficult.

If honesty, integrity, and fairness are company goals, this open environment can enable positive relationships within the workplace.

Cable television companies scramble signals so subscribers cannot receive unpaid-for channels. Computer companies hire personnel to figure out how to break into their own software programs to learn how to reduce pirating. It's a confusing world, getting more confusing each year. Yet into such a world, our world, steps the Seventh Commandment and the God who gave it—and bids us look more deeply at what the command means.

Martin Luther helps us here in

his Small Catechism when he asks, "What does this mean?" And we quickly learn that following the Seventh Commandment involves more than "not taking"; it also means restoring. Luther asserts

Unless employers model values of honesty and respect for others and their property, they cannot expect those working around them to do the same.

that to refrain from stealing requires a positive response to improve and protect our neighbor's property and means of making a living. Given such a meaning, activities like "company bashing," or rejoicing in the misfortunes of others—our employer or our competition or our co-workers—aren't just idle words but real infringements against the neighbor and the commandment.

Martin Marty in *The Hidden Discipline* quotes from Martin Luther's Large Catechism: "We are commanded to promote and further our neighbor's interests, and when he suffers want, we are to help, share, and lend to both friends and foes." This involves building up our neighbor or, in business, building up the image of employer, employees, competitors, industries.

Stealing, no matter its form, involves how people relate to others and their stewardship of those relationships. Relationships are never neutral; they are constantly being built up or being broken down.

Actions that preserve, protect, and build relationships result in fairness, justice, nurture, goodwill, and respect—those things the Seventh Commandment would have us do. It's the stewardship of relationships.

In business, everyone must support the stewardship of relationships. The employer needs to recognize that business functions only with the help of employees and customers. The employer should set the tone to create the environment, and serve as a model. Unless employers model values of honesty and respect for others and their property, they cannot expect those

working around them to do the same.

Providing livable salaries; training; enabling employees to reach their potential; establishing a code of ethics; and helping and supporting when people fall short of the goal are the hallmarks of a courageous business leader committed to the stewardship of others. Employers can create an environment where people do not have to cheat to win. Employers can avoid setting unrealistic goals that pressure employees and create rifts among their relationships. If honesty, integrity, and fairness are company goals, this open environment can enable positive relationships within the workplace.

Likewise, businesses set an example of behavior for customers. Word passes rapidly when businesses do not value relationships with their customers. Knowing a business is fair, and expects customers to be fair, is key.

When we feel good about our jobs, our companies, and the so-

led and desired goods, we are apt to withstand the pressures of doing. Each contributes to the success or failure of the business. Each is a gift from God. God is the source of all gifts—giving businesses. Businesses are structures within God's plans that provide opportunities for work and contributing to the good of people. Lifting up structures and nurturing our relationships with them is a model of stewardship and a living out of the Seventh Commandment. **CA**

Esther Arne manages a two-family telecommunications business. Prior to this she worked as a business manager for more than 35 years. A former



Women of the ELCA executive board treasurer; she and husband Harry have three children and five grandchildren.

Topic for discussion: What do you think?

It stealing to:

- Photocopy copyrighted weight-loss materials for a friend?
- Photocopy the LWT Bible study session for the circle?
- Have friends and family call you on the office 800 number?
- Copy your Christmas letter on the office photocopier?
- Return a blouse for full price when you bought it on sale?
- Break a jar in the grocery store and walk away from it?
- Call in sick when you're really not?
- Not say anything when a waiter undercharges you?
- Buy a used car for substantially less than it is worth?
- Sell a used car for substantially more than it's worth?
- Sell a used car when you know something big is about to go wrong?
- Over-value a donation for tax purposes?
- Keep a few choice items for yourself when boxing donated clothes for charity?
- Withhold information to get a desired response?
- Make an audio cassette of a favorite record for a friend?
- Rent an exercise video and tape it for future use?
- Throw away items you could recycle?

Answers: No answers here! Discuss among yourselves.

A Trinity of Mary

Mary Anna Bader

During the summer months of July and August the liturgical calendar of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America celebrates three women named Mary—Mary Magdalene on July 22; Mary, the sister of Martha, on July 29; and on August 15, Mary, the mother of our Lord.

Let's look at these women's stories and allow God to speak through these stories to speak for us. These three women who share the same name also share a special place in his ministry. Their feast days call us to remember their lives with thankful hearts.

July 22

**Mary
Magdalene**

*"May we have eyes, like
hers, to behold the Christ."*

Mary Magdalene

Mary Magdalene is named in all four gospels. Matthew, Mark, and John do not mention her at all until the time of the crucifixion. After that point, she becomes one of the main characters, witnessing the burial and the post-resurrection appearances of Christ.

Luke does not wait so long to mention Mary Magdalene. In 8:1-3 he identifies a number of women who accompanied Jesus as "he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God" (verse 1). All we know of Mary's history can be found in this section of Luke (and Mark 16:9). Jesus is said to have cast out seven demons from her. What or who these demons were isn't explained.

Beyond that, nothing is known except her involvement in the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus; the details vary from gospel to gospel. Mark 16:9 tells us that it was Mary Magdalene alone to whom Jesus first appeared. (John 20:18 also says this.) In Matthew's account, Mary Magdalene is one of two people to whom Jesus appears (28:1-10).

Luke's account is radically different. In his version, three women received news of Jesus' resurrection (24:1-10) from the tomb. (Later Jesus appeared to the 12 disciples, and no women are mentioned—see Luke 24:36.) The women ran to tell the disciples.

disciples this glorious news, but to the men, this news of the resurrection “seemed...an idle tale, and they did not believe them” (24:11).

What seems to be shared information in the gospels is that Jesus had healed Mary Magdalene of her demon possession. Personally cured by Christ, she stayed with him until the end, witnessing the crucifixion and his burial. She was greatly rewarded by Jesus by being one of the first to whom he appeared after the resurrection.

Her story of going from a demon-possessed woman to a devoted follower certainly gives us all hope! May we have eyes, like hers, to behold the Christ.

Mary, sister of Martha

Only Luke and John mention Mary of Bethany, the sister of Martha and Lazarus.

Luke 10:38-42 recounts the visit of Jesus to Mary and Martha's house. Each sister reacted differently to Jesus. Martha scuttled about, caring for many details. Mary, meanwhile, sat at Jesus' feet and listened to him. You know the rest of the story!

John says nothing of the above visit. In John 11, Lazarus—Mary and Martha's brother—was ill. By the time Jesus got there, Lazarus had died. After weeping over the death of this beloved man, Jesus

raises him from the dead.

In John 12, the risen Lazarus, Mary, and Martha entertain Jesus. Judas was also present. Mary took expensive perfume, anointed Jesus with it, then wiped his feet with her hair. Once again, her actions are called into question, this time by Judas. For a second time Jesus defends her.

Imagine having Jesus defend your actions! Mary had many experiences we might well envy.

May we learn from how she “did her own thing,” like anointing Jesus and wiping his feet with her hair, or even sitting and listening to him (when the expected role for a woman would have been to serve as a hostess). May her story give us the freedom to follow our hearts when it comes to serving Christ—regardless of how that might be perceived. May we care more about pleasing the Lord than pleasing others.

Mary, the mother of Jesus

Matthew speaks of Mary only three times—in Jesus' birth narrative (chapter 1), in the account of the visit of the Magi

ly 29

ary, sister
Martha

y we care more about
ing the Lord than
ing others.”

(chapter 2), and in 13:54-58, when the people of Nazareth to place Jesus, and they identify him as Mary's son.

Mark's only mention of Mary is in a parallel version to above incident at Nazareth (Mark 6:3).

John refers to Mary only in chapter 19:25-27, where we are told that Mary was at the foot of the cross, watching the crucifixion of her son. John includes details of a more heartwarming nature. While hanging on the cross, Jesus sees both his mother and the beloved disciple, John. Jesus provides for each of their needs, and sees that they act as mother and son.

When we look at the details of Mary's life in Matthew, Mark, and John have given us, we note that, at most, Mary is mentioned in connection with Jesus' birth, at a point in his ministry when he is teaching in Nazareth, and at his crucifixion. What about all the other times? We all know how influential mothers are in our development. We long to know more about Mary and the kind of mother and woman she was.

Happily, Luke gives us some glimpses of this by offering "snapshots" of their family life—such as when both Mary and Elizabeth were pregnant and Mary visited. Or when Jesus was circumcised and named. Or when he was presented in the Temple. Or that infamous Passover trip to Jerusalem, when they thought they had lost Jesus, only to find him still in the Temple. Mary had responded as any mother would, "Why have you treated us like this?" (Luke 2:48).

Oh, to have known the heart of Mary! Her heart of incredible joy that allowed her to break forth in song and praises to God! Her heart had such sorrow as she watched her own son hang and die on a cross.

May our hearts, like Mary's, be open to Jesus and to others. May we, as she did, have the strength to risk such grief and such great sorrow.

As we prepare for these summer days of celebration, may our lives be blessed from our having remembered these three. **G**

The Rev. Mary Anna Bader serves as interim pastor at Saints Peter and Paul Lutheran Church, Riverside, Ill. She taught Introduction to the Old Testament at Rosary College in River Forest, Ill.



August 15

Mary, mother of Jesus

"May our hearts, like Mary's, be open to Jesus and to others."

Brief Prayers on News Items

Sonia C. Groenewold

ur daily prayer list

through today's newspaper.
listen to the news on the radio
V. Then add people to your
er list. You might pray for:

Children whose names make
news because they are abused
murdered by parents or care-
ts;

Those who have lost homes
or family members to a nat-
disaster;

People whose lives are pro-
dly affected by economic con-
ns;

People who daily experience
nce in their community or
on;

Voting members and all who
nd the ELCA churchwide
mbly in August.

ELCA celebrates 25 years of women's ordination

pre-assembly celebration in
eapolis in August, participants
celebrate the 25th anniversary
omen's ordination in the
ran church. The celebration
nclude worship, Bible study,
hops, and plenary sessions.

*Creator God, we give thanks for
many and diverse gifts our
n clergy bring to the ELCA.
ngthen and bless each woman
serves in this way.*

◆ Churchwide assembly convenes

In the Aug. 16-23 assembly, voting
members will elect a new bishop for
the ELCA and will act on a social
statement on peace, the constitu-
tion's representational principles, a
mission-support formula, and an
urban-ministry resolution. The
assembly will not act but will hear a
report on the revised draft of a possi-
ble statement on human sexuality,
and will hear reports on the sacra-
mental-practices study and the state
of the ELCA's ministry in daily life.

*Guide the decision-makers, God
of light, so ELCA members and those
the church serves may flourish and
grow in faith and love.*

◆ Creative evangelism finds expression

Pilgrim Lutheran Church in
Puyallup, Wash., shares "quiet mes-
sages" about what it offers so it can
serve the community as well as the
congregation. With a series of fami-
ly-oriented events, Pilgrim hopes to
attract the community. It also offers
short hikes and outdoor events that
include prayers, fellowship, and
food. And in North Fort Myers, Fla.,
Messiah Lutheran Church spon-
sored a "Come and See" day that
included everything from exhibits to
a barbecue.

*Eternal God, give us a passion
for creative outreach.*

*Sonia C. Groenewold is senior news
editor of The Lutheran.*

Breaking Open the Jar: *Remembrance and Hope*

Much has happened since Nov. 22, 1970, when Elizabeth Platz became the first ordained Lutheran woman in the United States. The quarter-century since then has been marked by challenges and growth for both the church and the more than 1600 women pastors who have since served in our midst.

The church officially marks this 25th anniversary of the ordination of women in the Lutheran church on Aug. 14-16, 1995, in Minneapolis, Minn., at a gathering prior to the churchwide assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Participants will gather under the theme "Breaking Open the

Jar: Remembrance and Hope," taken from the story of the unknown woman who anoints Jesus in Mark 14:3-9.

LWT joins the celebration by offering this special section (pages 50-60). Here five women—four ordained and one lay—reflect on their own stories in Mark 14:3-9 and on their own lives in ministry. It is also, from the book Women in Ministry: A History, initiated and funded by Women of the ELCA, an excerpt in which Elizabeth Platz reflects on how she came to—remained in—the ordained ministry. Celebrate with us the gift of an ever-giving God.—ED.

A Long Line of Women

Kwang-Ja Yu

It is not without a bit of personal pride that I reflect on that day in January 1985 when I became the first woman of color ordained in the American Lutheran Church. On that day I joined the ranks of some very impressive sisters—twentieth-century pioneers who were finding new ways to serve Christ and the church.

As I knelt at the altar, and as that red stole was placed on my

shoulders for the first time, it seemed as if a world of new possibilities to serve Christ and his people had opened up before my eyes. That red stole—that sign of the pastoral office, the "yoke of service" that lay around my neck—was a reminder of the great honor and even greater responsibility that comes with accepting a call to Christ.

Ten years later, I still am humbled by the fact that I have been called

God and the church. Yet as I lived and loved and shared God's people these past years, we become profoundly aware the service to which I have called is, in a sense, nothing I can no longer think of myself as a pioneer.

Like the unknown woman in Luke 14:3-9 who was chosen to be distinguished by the anoint-

ing of the Lord's feet from other women of service and ministry, I now am able to distinguish between my service as ordained minister of the gospel and my service as baptized child of God. The truth is that we all stand in a long line of women who, like the woman in Bethany, have chosen to dedicate their gifts to Christ.

As a pastor, my teachers, men and women role models have not been absent from the lives of pastors of my youth. I have learned what it means to be a minister from the women of the Bible, from the women in my congregations, and most of all, I have learned from my mother what it means to be a minister by God.

Some of my oldest memories are of my mother reading the Bible to her children and gathering us together for family prayers. Every week she would herd her children and three nephews to church without fail. Yet her service went beyond Sunday morning, and even her own family. During the hardest years following the Civil War, Mother always set aside money to help the poor and minister to her neighbors. Often we children would complain that she was giving what little we had to the neighbors and to the church, but she

always insisted that God's work comes first.

My mother died two years ago, but the fruits of her selfless service, the fruits of her ministry, are still alive today. She provided me with an example of what it meant to be a

The truth is that we all stand in a long line of women who, like the woman in Bethany, have chosen to dedicate their gifts to Christ.

minister. She was the one who encouraged me to seek ordination. She was the one who upheld me with her prayers and sustained me with her love from halfway around the world. She was uneducated and unknown, yet she touched the lives of so many people. Even today, she continues to serve through the memorial fund she set up to provide scholarships for women at the seminary.

As the 25th anniversary of the ordination of women in the Lutheran church approaches, I celebrate the ministries of my mother, the unknown woman of Bethany, and those thousands of women and women pastors called to serve our Lord.

The Rev. Kwang-Ja Yu is the first woman of color ordained in the American Lutheran Church. She is a member of Grace Lutheran Church in Elmwood Park, Ill., where her husband, Dana Nissen, is pastor. They have one son, Dietrich.



**Lutheran
Women in
Ordained
Ministry**

1970-1995:

*Reflections
and
Perspectives*

Women of the ELCA has initiated and funded a collection of essays, written by women and men reflecting on the decision to ordain women, and how this has changed the church. The text also looks at the significant role of laywomen in the achievement of women's ordination. This book is a story of the whole church as it seeks to embody an inclusive vision of the people of God. Elizabeth Platz's essay is excerpted here.



My Story, Our Story

Elizabeth Platz Smith

On November 22, 1970, many people came together on the occasion of ordination to the Holy Ministry, Word and Sacrament. Many were there in person, all were with me in spirit. This is our story.

The preacher, Dr. Donald Heiges, and I started at Gettysburg Seminary together—the new president and I as a first-year student. I entered Gettysburg Seminary and discovered that Christian education was my assumed course of study. I tried it for a quarter, but didn't like it. I found myself in Dr. Heiges's office seeking to major in systematics.

Dr. Heiges was a man who saw possibilities, not barriers. "Well," said he, "why don't you take the bachelor of divinity program in which the thematic major is offered? Of course, you will have to take all the requirements: preaching, pastoral care, etc."

So my course was set. I was sure that I had a desire to become a pastor, but I did want to study theology. Two years later, the question of it

rose; it was an option, strong-couraged but not required. my noninterest in being a ; there was no strong need to e an internship and, as Dr. s knew, there really was no for me to go. But he opened er door. This one was service, g my senior year, with John rsdall, then chaplain at sburg College. What a won- gift.

astor John Vannorsdall was a or like no other. From him I ed the model of the ministry of ng seeds. He asked, "Could I ith the hope of the sower and o the satisfaction of seeing the grow?"

earing the end of my senior in seminary, I finally consid- what now?" After all, system- or not, one has to eat and earn ng. In those days pastors came erview the seniors awaiting Dr. Heiges found the opportuni- tell me that I might not be all welcome. And it was true. But be discouraged, Dr. Heiges was to open the door to ministry her education.

nd so I found myself sitting in niversity of Maryland Chapel, ing to Dr. Heiges preach at my ation. This is his story as well. he service was my first oppor- y to offer communion to my z. Mom and Dad, my sister y, my brother-in-law David, my Amy Beth, and my Sunday l teacher, Mrs. Esther Succop, the heart of the story. My par- confidence and trust in me far exceeded my own. Their rt was never in question. he ordaining officer at my ation was Paul Orso, president

(later to be called bishop) of the Maryland Synod, Lutheran Church in America. He was a door-opener. Paul Orso helped me see there was no need to apologize for my gender, no need to assume characteristics of the male gender, and no need to assert my femaleness as the primary reason for ordination. In other words, act like you belong, for you do—an invaluable understanding which helped steer a course among



Pastor Platz gives communion to her mother.

other people's agendas, my own fears, and the wonder of the pastorate.

My colleagues in and outside the synod offered many gifts for my ordination—prayers, support, cartoons, encouragement. Leon Haines, secretary of the synod, saw that the preprinted *brother* on the ordination certificate was obliterated and a beautiful calligraphic *sister* took its place. Amidst all these gifts there did come the ugliness of letters and phone calls describing me as an

instrument of Satan, the whore of Babylon, and other expressions of fear and anger. The overwhelming care offered me was a rich antidote to such wounding behavior. Such care continues.

The presiding minister—Gil Doan—was not accustomed to wearing a chasuble—and a '70s one it was, with glowing colors and butterflies. Gil Doan, regional director for National Lutheran Campus Ministry, is a central character of my story. He would become a mentor for me—teaching respect for the use of the mind, the pursuit of understanding, the unique worth of each person. Collegiality marked the presence of the final partner in the laying on of hands. The chairman of the ecumenical chapel staff and an Episcopal priest, Wofford Smith, took part in the laying on of hands at a time when his own church did not ordain women. Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, and Roman Catholic colleagues were all present.

Wofford and the chapel colleagues helped me relinquish the need to defend my ordination, and be free of the chip on my shoulder placed there by my insecurity and the agendas of others. With Wofford I would celebrate the mid-weekly Eucharist for 20 years. He would be an example of one who strives to discern justice and speak for those who cannot be heard. In time, after many years, this best friend became my beloved husband. His death has not ended his presence. My story would be incomplete without him.

The lessons were read by the chancellor of the university and a

faculty member. Students serve ushers. The seminary choir sang from the balcony. This service was a confluence of forces that still shape my life 25 years later.

The core story was present before me as I looked at the bread and wine—Christ given and shed for you, for me. My story flows but from this, and it is not a story alone. There have been countless and powerful figures, only a few whom I have mentioned. There are many whom I shall never know. I have made a story of a woman, if possible: our grandmother, the faith; scores of faithful women, often lost in the telling of our story; the women of the church serving for generations; the countless hours of discussion, communion, work, and exemplary ministry by women lay leaders and church staff, all preparing the ground for inclusion.

“Lift up your hearts...” he said, the ever-new and invigorating entrance to the Eucharist. To be able to issue this invitation, to be an instrument in offering this gift of blessing at each celebration. To say the words “given for you,” “shed for you”; to offer them is an honor offered to those who serve at the altars. This is my story.

Soli Deo Gloria.

“My Story, Our Story” is excerpted from *Lutheran Women Ordained Ministry 1970-1990: Reflections and Perspectives*, edited by Gloria Bengtson. The book will be available in August, from Augsburg Fortress, for \$9.95, code number LT10-28235.

Alabaster Jar

beneath my bed, in alabaster,
is my most prized possession.

ne knows my jar's beauty or contents...
nor understands the depths of its hue,
splendor of the rainbow which safely guards its
precious ointment.

own by neighbors and authorities in the village,
I retreat daily to the warmth of my hearth.
her with the air, I dance,
entwined in a prism of colors.
ing the fire, I feel the beauty of possibility, the
strength of hope.

room I am transformed
released to see and be, to know and do
all that is within my heart.
day I will share these gifts which are inside;
day I will risk, try.

safety warms me now
bility, strength, hope are for tomorrow.
Today the fire comforts me...
r, its contents fill me; I am satisfied.

ess and nameless, I move through the crowds,
ing as the village voices whisper
a rebel, a prophet, a priest,
perhaps a king!"

ing...as he stands facing those who confront him,
waiting...as he tends to those in need.

ence, I carry my jar to the place of our meeting,
remembering the words that beckon me there.
Passover cometh,
the Lord hath need, a lamb must be prepared.

*The Rev. Karen Battle
Columbus, Ohio*

She Broke Open the Jar

She broke open the jar.

It seemed to her the obvious thing to do.

It was an action that emerged from her being quite
naturally.

Not a matter of particular courage,

and certainly not an act of insolence,

she did that which seemed appropriate,
indeed, right and salutary!

Some, however, saw her deed as audacious, imperious.

They chided her,

presuming to have the authority,

the superiority, to do so.

They maligned her motives, substituting their own.

Ah, but Jesus saw things differently!

He saw her action as proper, legitimate, and faithful.

Twenty-five years ago and before,

many Lutherans saw the ordination of women
the way the disciples saw the action of the woman who
anointed Jesus.

Most never questioned that only men were ordained.

Those who were accustomed to making the rules,
drawing the boundaries,

determined that women were not fit to be pastors,
or had not even considered the idea of ordaining women.

ne women were doing
what seemed to be obvious and natural.
engaged in broader and broader forms of ministry.
Like their sisters before them
 who had responded to God's grace
 in varieties of service,
and those who had felt called to ordination,
 but were denied it,
omen felt called by God to break open the jar!

not a matter of being audacious or imperious,
it was an obvious calling.
ed as natural for them
to preside at the table or bath in worship,
erving the meal or bathing a child
in their homes.

irit moved the church,
despite its previous history and hesitation,
gnize the validity
of women's call to the ordained ministry.
She broke open the jar!

-five years later
some still feel as did those early disciples.
Some protest and malign the call of women.

Jesus sees it differently!
rds form a blessing
on this 25th anniversary of the
ordination of women:
I tell you, wherever the Good News is proclaimed
 in the whole world,
he has done will be told in remembrance of her."

*The Rev. Karen Parker
Englewood, Colo.*



The Seasons of Service

Darkness, desolation, despair,
winter's waiting.

I have been told, over and over again
that I am worthless.

And I believe it.

By myself, I am nothing.

The seeds of value that I once poss
have been blown away,
scattered.

My soul, now dried, yellowed and d
is all that remains.

Bound by icy pain.

Surprising warmth in a fleeting breeze.

Earthy scents of change.

Spring hopes.

I have felt God's words of comfort.

The sun, God's Son, returns.

But I hesitate.

I lack courage to believe
that I can grow again.

But signs do surround me.

Strong green shoots break through
earth's frozen crust.

Warm storms bring tears which refresh.

I can no longer doubt.



ocus, trust.
er's strength,
e flora, I joyously stretch
toward the light of Christ's presence.
pproach him despite their reproaches because
e love compels me, moves me, changes me,
fills me with vibrant energy.
e urgent need to thank him.
ous new blossoms of life I now open,
honoring the creator.
ragrance of ointment fills the air.
rings me from darkness to life.
eed to serve.

*Sister Annette Janka
Cordova, Alaska*



Did She Count the Cost?

I wonder if she counted the cost
before she acted.
Did she think about the money spent?
Three hundred denarii...
Three hundred days' wages,
almost a year.
Was it worth it?

Did she think about the health risks
of visiting the house of a leper?
or the possible damage to her reputation?
Was she concerned about
what people might say about this

(continued)

extravagant and
seemingly senseless
act?

I'll never know what she was thinking,
only that she acted.

She recognized the man
who sat at Simon's table,
and she acted.

She took a risk,
took the chance,
followed her calling,
and she acted.

Lord God,
I'm not sure I could be
that spontaneous
or extravagant.

I think too much.
I usually weigh my words and actions.
Sometimes that's good.
But sometimes
it gets in the way
of following my call

Help me to listen, Lord,
to learn how I'm being called.
Give me courage
to take risks,
to go against the grain.

Fill me with your love, Lord,
that it may spill out of me
like nard
from an alabaster jar.

Help me to be extravagant
in my loving and living.

*The Rev. Cheryl F. Meinschein
Wescosville, Pa.*

Jean

Last week one of my mentors died.

Jean was the boss of my first administrative job. I did not appreciate her fully in the days. It is only when I came to work for Women of the ELCA that I have realized how much she taught me.

Jean was a very practical administrator. "Administration," she would tell me, "is 95% personality. I thought she was exaggerating—now there are days when I think she was underestimating.

I never leave the office without telling someone where I am going—something else I learned from Jean. I must always know where to find her," Jean would say. Another lesson of hers I remember well: "You learn more by keeping your mouth open than by asking questions."

Jean taught me about the importance of inter-departmental, cross-unit work. She may have come to this style of working because the management of our women's college was such that collaboration with others was the only way to get things done, but it was a valuable lesson.

Jean gave me opportunity to



work with adult women returning to college, which gave me wonderful experience for my work with Women of the ELCA.

Jean believed that women should be challenged, that seri-

ous work should be expected of them. Candice Bergen (TV's Murphy Brown) said that when Jean expelled her from college, it was the first time in her life anyone had taken her seriously as a person, and not patronized her because of who her father was.

My last real visit with Jean took place just before I moved to Chicago. We had a good day together, but it was already clear she was having difficulty remembering things. After that I saw her several times, but it was too late to tell her how much I valued all I had learned from her. Her wonderful academically trained mind was no longer working.

I wish the realization of just how much I owed her had come to me sooner.

Still, now, I want to say, "Rest well, Jean, and thank you." ❧

*Charlotte E. Fiechter
Executive Director
Women of the ELCA*

Both/And!

As I look back at my growing-up years on the farm, I recall that our barn was rarely full. Were my folks doing something wrong as farmers? Why didn't they have full barns or need bigger barns? What kind of stewards were they?

Today the answer is clear to me. They weren't barn-builders; they were relaters—people with relational connections and relational arenas for carrying out their daily tasks and ministries. Our barn did not represent ownership or worldly success. Our barn was representative of how my parents related to God, family, friends, neighbors, the community, and the world.

The barn—this manifestation of a wonderful relationship with God—allowed my parents to barter crops for money when the family needed shoes, food, and medicine. The barn allowed them to help out the neighbors when their daughter needed dental work they could not afford. The barn allowed them to buy the pastor-intern a new suit and support missionaries in Hong Kong and New Guinea, as well as persons with leprosy in India.

The barn helped keep the church doors open so that people with all kinds of needs, joys, sorrows, and challenges could come in

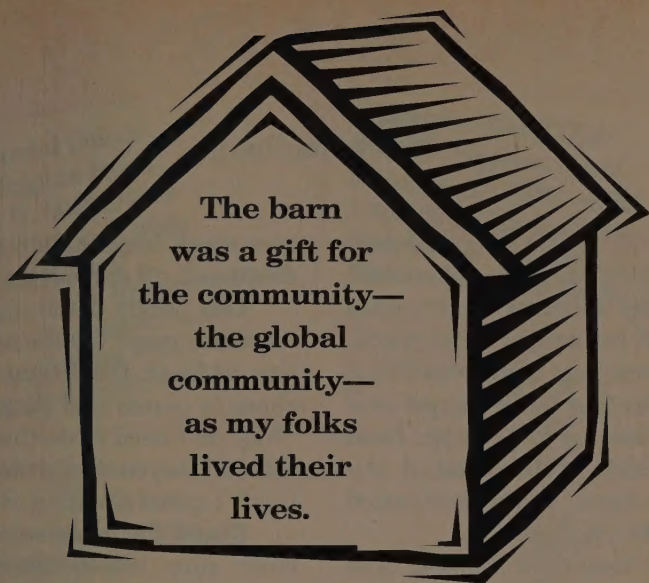
and return to their fields, homes, factories, schools, playgrounds, offices with the peace that our relationship with God gives. When the barn wasn't full enough, my parents called upon their neighbors to go to their "barns" to meet specific needs and celebrate God's goodness and generosity.

They took care of relationships—with the land, equipment, people, organizations—and the barn helped them do that. The barn was, after all, a gift for the community—the global community—where my folks lived their lives.

Now I doubt that they gave much conscious thought. In fact, they might be/have been surprised to hear how I've described them. It is, however, what they taught me about stewardship.

And so, it's no wonder I'm bothered when it comes to stewardship. This ownership talk bothers me because I don't believe God gave us everything we have...and some. Not because we could stand to be reminded when we have inflated egos about what's mine and what's yours or theirs.

I'm bothered because of the global community, how we live and how all this ownership talk is translated into daily practice. People choosing to meet needs of the local community over the g



munity when I believe the
n” allows them to do both. I see
are reform pitting the status
rights of those who pay into the
em against the needs and hopes
nose who do not have what it
s to live and/or raise a family
y. I see a lot of “either/or” and
as much “both/and” in steward-
today.

To paraphrase a song, I think
t the world needs now more
ever is relationship, not own-
ip. Ownership as our society
ws it causes us to:

take out more insurance and
security measures;
seek to maintain or enhance
our place on the ladder of
success;
look out for “number one”;
blow our own horn louder and
longer than others do.
tationship allows us to:
celebrate that we have some-

thing to give when it is
needed;

- remain faithful to treating everyone as a person of equal worth in the community of God;
- enlarge the circle so everyone takes their place at the table of God’s largesse;
- blow God’s horn, and that of every person and all of creation, in one big celebration.

It’s an overwhelming compli-
ment to know that God operates
with a both/and, what’s-mine-is-
yours approach. It’s an exciting chal-
lenge to know that we, too, can
respond in the same way. Stewardship, after all, is relative—a
respector of persons, everywhere,
every day, every way. **C**

Bonnie B. Belasic
Director for Communications
and Stewardship Interpretation

Breech Baby

Mary Lindberg

"Bottom's up!" I heard the surgeon say. In the next moment my daughter Molly's cries announced her arrival in the world.

We knew that Molly would be a breech baby. She never turned over inside my uterus to place her head into the birth canal. Instead she kept her head securely situated beneath my rib cage.

So a Cesarean section was scheduled. At 11 A.M. on Oct. 7 the surgeons' loving, capable hands lifted Molly out of her world of nine months and into a "parallel universe." Doctors and nurses cared for Molly and me. Finally, her father proudly carried Molly, swaddled in a blanket, and presented her to me.

Exactly eight weeks later I boarded planes in Chicago and Paris that would deliver me into another "parallel universe." After 15 hours of flying, we landed in Cameroon, where my husband, Chris, and I are serving as Evangelical Lutheran Church in America missionaries. In the space of the jetway connecting our airplane to the Douala Airport we were transported across worlds. African faces speaking other languages lined the hallway. The comfort of air-conditioning was replaced in an instant by heavy, humid air. My cul-

ture shock began that day and continued, off and on, for months.

Like Molly, I felt reluctant to leave one world for the next. As day to day to leave the States nearer I clung to places and people I knew. "Why do I need to do this?" I asked myself. "Do you really need me to do this?" I asked God.

One of the books we read about child care labeled newborns as unsettled. Molly often cried during those first weeks as she made major adjustments from her former environment to the new one.

I, too, have come kicking and screaming into this new place where I feel unsettled and disoriented. I still look longingly back at the place I knew so well, with its material comforts and familiar people, language, and systems.

Loving hands have gently pulled me into this new place. Hundreds of hands! Cameroonians shake hands upon greeting and leaving others. Choirs joyfully clasp their hands and remind me of God's good news. Friends' and families' hands clasp in prayer for our safety and adjustment. Through their hands God lovingly welcomes me into another part of God's world and invites me to trust that, in God's presence, we are already home.

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*Oh, God of the whole world,
help us discern community in our
world. And help us to give, and receive,
from each other as members of your
same loving family. Amen.*

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